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AUTHOR	Cronn-Mills, Daniel; Croucher, Stephen M.
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ABSTRACT

The goal of forensics is to teach students the complexity and impact of communication on the human condition. The ballot is the key to the educational process within the competitive realm of forensics. The judge is both an adjudicator and a teacher within each round, and, therefore, ballots should provide students with comments indicating reasons for the judges' decisions; strengths and weaknesses of the student's abilities; and strengths and weaknesses of the student's selection/material. Ballot comments in limited preparation events (extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking) provide a unique context for analysis. Data are from ballots written by judges during the 2000-2001 intercollegiate competitive season. Ballots were gathered after the completion of the season and are from a number of schools throughout the upper Midwest. The method used was based on Cary and Rodier's (1987) approach and Krippendorf's (1980) syntactical method of unit analysis. Evaluated were 110 ballots written for students competing in extemporaneous speaking. Eight primary categories were chosen, in hierarchical order, according to number of comments elicited: analysis; delivery; organization; sources; introduction; time; question; and miscellaneous. Also evaluated were impromptu speaking comments, and seven categories were generated: analysis; delivery; time; structure; introduction; quotation; and miscellaneous. Two major concerns were identified as illuminated by the data: the issue of "canned" speeches in extemporaneous speaking, and lack of an RFD (reason for decision) in impromptu speaking. An inordinate number of judges indicated they believed extemporaneous speeches were "canned," while not one ballot analyzed in impromptu speaking provided an RFD. (Contains 34 references.) (NKA)

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JUDGING THE JUDGES

AN ANALYSIS OF BALLOTS IN IMPROMPTU AND EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING

Daniel Cronn-Mills, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Director of Forensics
Minnesota State University
Mankato, MN 56001
Daniel.cronn-mills@mnsu.edu

Stephen M. Croucher
Graduate Teaching Assitant
Assistant Forensic Coach
Minnesota State University
Mankato, MN 56001
Smc106@yahoo.com

Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the
National Communication Association
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D. Cronn-Mills

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JUDGING THE JUDGES
AN ANALYSIS OF BALLOTS IN IMPROMPTU AND EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING

Introduction

Intercollegiate forensics is an educational enterprise. The goal of forensics is to teach students the complexity and impact of communication on the human condition. Students, whether engaged in prepared public address events, oral interpretation events, or limited preparation events, are expanding their understanding of the centrality of the communication process. The ballot is the key to the educational process within the competitive realm of forensics. Students should be able to understand how they performed in rounds, based on the comments judges write on ballots. The judge is both an adjudicator and a teacher within each round, and, therefore, ballots should provide students with comments indicating reasons for their decisions; strengths and weaknesses of the student's abilities; and strengths and weaknesses of the student's selection/material. The judge has the responsibility, therefore, to teach each competitor about critical issues within their events, their material and their performance through ballot comments.

The overall importance of the ballot should not be underestimated. What a judge writes on a ballot has an impact on students. Rice and McGowan (1997) examined whether the comments judges write impact a students' self-esteem. They determined both positive and negative comments had a measurable impact on students' self-esteem.

The importance both coaches and students place on ballots is evident in a study done by Peters (1998). Peters focused on how coaches and students determine the validity of judges' comments. Peters' research indicates three key factors used to evaluate ballot comments: (1) examining the nature of the comments; (2) the competitive reputation of a school/judge; and (3) comments from a former national champion or highly respected former competitor.

The ballot has become a significant component of intercollegiate forensics. The importance and centrality of the ballot should not be underestimated and is, therefore, worthy of extensive analytical evaluation.

Review of Literature

Research focusing on individual-event ballots, due to its obvious educational centrality to intercollegiate forensics, has received scrutiny from the discipline. Scholars in forensics, for example, have been quick to suggest ballot/judging criteria, uniform judging codes, and standards for ballot writing (Allen & Dennis, 1989; Bartanen, 1990, Hanson, 1989; Hanson, 1988; Hanson, 1987; Harris, 1987; Jones, 1989; Kosloski, 1990; Lewis, 1984; Lewis, Keaveney & Leigh, 1984;Logue, 1988; ; Mills, 1983; Mills, 1990; Murphy, 1988; Preston, 1983; Rice, 1992; Ross, 1984; Tucker, 1989; VerLinden, 1987).

Studies have explored the content of ballots focusing on original speaking events (Jensen, 1988; Pratt, 1987), communication analysis/rhetorical criticism (Dean & Benoit, 1984; Harris, 1987), and oral interpretation events (Mills, 1991; Jensen, 1997a; Jensen, 1997b; Jensen, 1998).

A particularly unique area of research is addressing the reason-for-decision (RFD) on individual-event ballots. The RFD goes beyond more traditional ballot comments by indicating the precise reason a student earned a particular rank/rate in the round. The RFD, while a clear indicator of the competitive dimension of forensics also plays a critical teaching function. The student is able to learn from the RFD the reasons for a rank/rate, and take steps to address the issues raised. Scholars who have taken up the issue of RFDs include Burnett and Cronn-Mills, 1994; Hanson, 1997; Mills, 1990; Olson, 1992; Olson and Wells, 1988; Scott and Birkholdt, 1996.

Little explicit research has been conducted, however, in the area of ballot comments in limited preparation events. We contend limited preparation events deserve scrutiny. The two limited preparation events (extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking) provide a unique context for analysis. The limited preparation events are the only events in which the content of the speech is markedly different in every round of competition and, thus, the ephemeral nature of the event may influence the composition of comments judges may write.

Method

The data for our study are ballots written by judges during the 2000-2001 intercollegiate competitive season. The ballots are from a number of schools throughout the upper midwest. The ballots were gathered after the completion of the season. We sent a request to directors throughout the area to send all available ballots for inclusion in the study. The ballots are from a broad diversity of students and judges throughout the nation.

Our method is based on the approach used by Carey and Rodier (1987) and Krippendorf's (1980) syntactical method of unit analysis. Each ballot was analyzed for its comments. A comment, according to Carey and Rodier (1987) is the "smallest unit possible.... if a comment was a restatement, it was still counted twice" (p. 5).

Our study did not use pre-set categories, rather we allowed the categories to emerge from the data. Specifically, we used Berelson's (1952) subject-matter orientation in which the categories are only limited by the imaginationof the researchers.

Results

Extemporaneous Speaking

We evaluated 110 ballots written for students competing in extemporaneous speaking. Our coding process resulted in 43 initial categories. Upon further reflection, we combined categories of a similar nature in order to better define the primary categories. The eight primary categories are listed below in hierarchical order, according to the number of comments elicited.

Analysis

Analysis comments question the information provided by the speaker along with any analytical questions the judge may have in regards to the speaker's speech, or how the question was answered. 281 total comments were written by judges about analysis issues.

We identified six relevant patterns with the *Analysis* theme:

(1) additional clarification needed (e.g., "what about Fox's recent election? How will that effect economic growth?"); 130 comments

(2) analytical compliments (e.g., "nice analysis of the economic restraints of communism in Russia"); 72 comments

(3) analysis effectively answers question; 61 comments

(4) troubled thesis statement (e.g., "I don't really understand what your answer to the question is"); 11 comments

(5) analytical repetition (e.g., "your second point is just like your first point"); 5 comments

(6) audience analysis (e.g., "you should try to relate your question to your audience better"); two comments

Delivery

Delivery comments highlighted the speakers' overall verbal and nonverbal presentation within the rounds. We counted 265 total comments dealing with delivery-related issues. We identified eight patterns within the *Delivery* theme:

(1) nice overall presentation; 101 comments

(2) nonverbal (e.g., "make your gestures meaningful"; "put the pen down"); 60 comments

(3) verbal flubs (e.g., "watch your enunciation, you're swallowing words"); 32 comments

(4) speed issues (e.g., "slow down, *hombre*"); 30 comments

(5) word choice (e.g., "avoid using the word 'like'"); 16 comments

(6) energy (e.g., "nice energy", "nice energetic style"); 11 comments

(7) nice conversational tone; 10 comments

(8) effective use of humor; 5 comments

Organization

Organization comments focused on the overall structure and framing of the speech. We identified 162 comments on organizational matters. A total of five patterns emerged dealing with organization and framing issues:

(1) structure of speech (e.g., "strong analytical outline," "speech seems disjointed"); 71 comments

(2/3) transitions; 34 comments

(2/3) summation and/or conclusion; 34 comments

(4) preview statements; 14 comments

(5) tag lines (e.g., "tag lines for your main points do not make sense"); 1 comment

Sources

Sources comments addressed the overall use and validity of sources used or not used within the speech. We coded 142 comments relating to source issues. We noted six patterns in the *Sources* theme:

(1) sources flowed by judge; 60 ballots had sources flowed[1]

(2) more sources needed; 39 comments

(3) source credibility; 16 comments

(4) diversity of sources; 12 comments

(5) nice current sources; 8 comments

(6) source allocation (e.g., "all of your sources are in your first point"); 7 comments

Introduction

Introductions comments focused on whether the introduction grabbed the audiences' attention and linked to the question. A total of 110 comments were coded. We identified three patterns with the *Introduction* theme:

(1) effectiveness of attention-getter; 68 comments

(2) introduction relevance and link to question; 40 comments

(3) requested a source citation in introduction; 2 comments

Time

Time comments deals with the competitors use and balance of time. We counted 47 comments addressing *time* factors, with three patterns:

(1) time allocation (e.g., "work to balance time use in points one and two"); 33 comments

(2) Length of speech (e.g., "speech was too short, you had more time to work with"); 7 comments

(3) Overtime; 7 comments

Question

Question deals with the competitor's choice among the three questions provided. Nineteen comments were coded as dealing with the question. Three themes emerged from the data dealing with *questions*:

(1) significance of question; 7 comments

(2) choice (e.g., "you should have chosen one of the other questions"); 6 comments

(3) justification (e.g., "you need to justify why you chose the question"); 6 comments

Miscellaneous

Miscellaneous encompass the remainder of coded comments which do not fit within the themes established above. A total of 323 total comments are identified as miscellaneous. We address 9 patterns within the *miscellaneous* theme:

(1) judge flowed speech; 102

(2) judge timed speech; 95[2]

(3) ego-boosters (e.g., "great job, congrats on finals"); 51 comments

(4) reason-for-decision provided; 25 comments

(5) canned speech; 21 comments

(6) competitor etiquette (e.g., "don't fall asleep in rounds," "wait until your called before going to the front of the room"); 15 comments

(7) personal comments (e.g., "glad to see you again"); 5 comments

(8) clothing (.e.g, "nice suit") 3 comments

(9) memorization (e.g., "lose the notecard"); 1 comment

Impromptu Speaking

We evaluated 110 ballots written for students competing in impromptu speaking generating 1194 total comments. Our coding process resulted in 45 initial categories. Upon further reflection, we combined categories of a similar nature in order to better define the primary categories. The seven primary categories are listed below in hierarchical order according to the number of comments elicited.

Analysis

Analysis comments address the overall analytical flow and problematic issues with the speaker's explanation of the quotation. A total of 326 comments are coded as analytical. We identified six emergent patterns within the *Analysis* theme.

(1) analytical concerns (.e.g., "you're analysis does not address the second part of the quotation"); 180 comments

(2) thesis (e.g., "what exactly is your thesis," "get to your thesis sooner"); 57 comments

(3) analytical compliments (e.g., "nice analysis here"); 50 comments

(4) point balance (e.g., "your main points need to balance better analytically"); 19 comments

(5/6) flow (.e.g, "your ideas don't flow together very well"); 10 comments

(5/6) subpoints (e.g., "your subpoints need to fit better under your main points"); 10 comments

Delivery

Delivery deals primarily with the overall verbal and nonverbal presentation of the speaker. A total of 221 comments were coded as addressing delivery-related issues. We coded 10 patterns within the *Delivery* theme.

(1) overall presentation; 85 comments

(2) nonverbals (e.g., gestures, eye contact); 60 comments

(3) word choice (e.g., "be sure verbs and nouns agree"); 24 comments

(4) speech (e.g., "slow down") 20 comments

(5) humor (e.g., "add some humor," "nice use of humor"); 10 comments

(6/7/8) energy (e.g., "nice energetic style of delivery"); 6 comments

(6/7/8) enunciation (e.g., "stop swallowing your words"); 6 comments

(6/7/8) pronunciation (e.g., "watch overall pronunciation") 6 comments

(9) confidence; 3 comments

(10) repetition (e.g., "stop repeating yourself"); 1 comment

Time

Time deals with the overall use of time and whether time was kept by the judge for the speaker. We coded 163 comments dealing with time factors. Five patterns emerged within the theme of *Time*.

(1) overall time kept by judge; 65

(2) prep time kept by judge; 55

(3) time usage ("use your time better") 28 comments

(4) prep faster; 8 comments

(5) overtime; 7 comments

Structure

Structure deals with the overall organization and framing of the speech with 128 comments identified. We noted six categories related to *structure*.

(1) conclusion; 33 comments

(2) analytical framework (e.g., "I like the two-point analysis," "a 3x1 is weaker than 2x2"; 30 comments

(3) preview statements; 28 comments

(4/5) transitions; 16 comments

(4/5) overall organization pattern; 16 comments

(6) outline (e.g., "I like your outline"); 5 comments

Introduction

Introduction comments address how well the speaker begins their speech.

(1) effectiveness of intro; 58 comments

Quotation

Quotation deals with the speaker's choice of quotation and how they referred to it in the speech. A total of 31 comments in six patterns focused on the quotation.

(1) references to quotation (e.g., "I like how you refer back to the quotation"); 12 comments

(2) paraphrase (e.g., "you paraphrased the quotation well") 10 comments

(3) agree/disagree (e.g., "take a stand on the quotation") 3 comments

(4/5/6) choice (e.g., "always choose the shorter quotation"); 2 comments

(4/5/6) quotation vs. quote (e.g., "it's not a quote"); 2 comments

(4/5/6) disagreement (e.g., "disagreeing with the quotation lets you stand out"); 2 comments

Miscellaneous

Miscellaneous encompass the remainder of coded comments which do not fit within the themes established above. A total of 154 total comments are identified as miscellaneous. We address eight patterns within the *miscellaneous* theme.

(1) speech flowed by judge; 80 comments

(2) ego-boosters (e.g., "nice job"); 35 comments

(3) etiquette (e.g., "please watch speakers after you"); 13 comments

(4) personal (e.g., "nice to see you again"); 12 comments

(5) audience rapport (e.g., "you have the audience in the palm of your hand"); 5 comments

(6) clothing (e.g., "nice suit"); 2 comments

(7/8) notecard (e.g., "lose the notecard"); 1 comment

(7/8) credibility (e.g., "keep working on your credibility"); 1 comment

Interpretation

We identify two major concerns illuminated in the data: (1) issue of "canned" speeches in extemporaneous speaking and (2) lack of RFDs in impromptu speaking. First, an inordinate number of judges indicated they believed extemporaneous speeches were "canned." We define a canned speech as a presentation which is prefabricated before the questions for the round were provided to the student. A common indicator of a canned speech was when the presentation was non-unique to the question posed. For example, a number of judges commented on how the speech was not specifically linked to the question. The lack of a clear link generated doubt in the mind of the judge that the speech was not actually prepared during the designated 1/2-hour preparation period for the round. We are concerned about this issue on various levels: (1) are students pre-prepping speeches based on assumptions of what

the questions may be on any given weekend? (2) are coaches encouraging students to pre-prep extemporaneous speeches? (3) are coaches actually pre-prepping speeches themselves for their students to present? We encourage various national organizations to develop standards concerning the issue of canned speeches in extemporaneous speaking. Invitational tournament directors may decide to conduct an evidence check before the final round of extemporaneous speaking. We would encourage a variation of the rules of extemporaneous speaking employed by the National Forensic League (NFL). "Speakers shall prepare an original extemporaneous speech without references to previously prepared notes or speeches."[3] We understand the enforcement of such a policy would be difficult for tournament officials, however the policy would, at minimum, set the ethical framework for the event. Current AFA-NIET tournament regulations do not specifically bar canned speeches. The 2001-2002 AFA-NIET invitation states, "[contestants] have 30 minutes to prepare a speech that is the original work of the student." The NIET language does not bar students from pre-prepping speeches as long as the work is original to the contestant.

Second, the study found out of the 110 ballots analyzed in impromptu speaking, not one ballot provided a reason for decision (RFD). Students, obviously, want to know how they did in the round, in direct comparison to the other competitors. The use of RFDs, we believe, is a critical component of the ballot and is essential in impromptu. Impromptu, by nature, is ephemeral. Since each impromptu speech and round is unique, it is essential for a student to know how their abilities compared to other students in that specific round. The use of RFDs is not new in forensics (see Burnett and Cronn-Mills, 1994; Hanson, 1997; Mills, 1990; Olson, 1992; Olson and Wells, 1988; Scott and Birkholdt, 1996), however, their application is clearly not present in contemporary practices. We encourage tournament directors to designate a specific portion of the ballot to RFDs. We recognize many tournaments already have a

designated RFD section. However, tournament directors need to request judges to complete the RFD sections of the ballot just as we request judges to properly fill in their master ballots.

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[1] The total number under flowing of sources is different than in previous categories. The flowing of the sources is different since the ballot must be counted as a whole is not able to generate potentially numerous comments of similar nature.

[2] The total number under "judge timed speech" is different than in the majority of categories. Each ballot will only contain one indicator of the length of the speech, thus each ballot is counted as the whole and cannot generate numerous comments of a similar nature.

[3] The rules of the NFL are available online at: http://debate.uvm.edu/NFL/nflhome.html; click on the "NFL National Tournament Manual" link.